

# Welcome

Welcome to FIRST ENVIRONMENTS EARLY LEARNING CENTER, a day care facility organized by parents and supported by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS). First Environments operates as a nonprofit cooperative venture, and is dedicated to providing quality care for preschool children.

This HANDBOOK FOR PARENTS provides general information about the Center's program, administrative procedures, operating guidelines, health and safety policies, and required parental involvement. Parents will find that most of their questions about First Environments are answered in this handbook. For specific situations that may not be covered, parents are encouraged to seek additional information from the Director.

# HANDBOOK FOR PARENTS

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# **1.0 Introduction: Purpose, Philosophy, Goals and General Operation**

## **1.1 Purpose**

The purpose of the Child Care Center is to support First Environments' families, and to provide quality programming. To accomplish these ends the Center provides a safe, consistent, and enriched environment where developmentally appropriate activities encourage exploration and "hands on" learning.

## **1.2 Philosophy**

First Environments Learning Center provides children with a caring, safe, and secure environment that utilizes a child centered curriculum. This curriculum is based on the emotional, physical, social, and cognitive needs of the individual child. The developmental needs of the child are used to determine appropriate activities carried out with that child. Because children grow and develop at different rates, this approach offers them the opportunity to explore each area of development at their own pace.

Center staff members create an atmosphere of support and affection as well as providing the materials, equipment, and experience required to optimize the experiences of each child. They also serve as examples to the children, since children learn as much by observing others as they do by direct instruction. The teaching staff members act as facilitators rather than directors of activities.

The environment is carefully planned based on an assessment of each child's skills. Planning is most obvious by the presence of "interest centers" in every classroom. These centers include art, dramatic play, manipulative or small motor skills, gross motor play or blocks, sand, water, books, listening, etc. Teachers make available a wide variety of activities in each "interest center." Children are encouraged to explore all interest centers. Teachers provide an external structure for the day and provide the children time to work in the centers. Their exploration of the environment is usually self-initiated. Because of the variety of materials, children can learn several different skills in each center. Creativity is enhanced by the open-endedness of the learning materials. A sense of responsibility and powerfulness is also promoted by allowing children to choose their own activities.

Some of the attendant beliefs of a developmentally appropriate, child-centered curriculum are:

- Play is the child's way of working and learning.
- Children's play becomes their work as they discover new materials in the environment.
- Learning is what children do; it is not something that is done to them.
- The classroom environment will be designed to encourage self learning with guided practice from the teacher.
- Children grow and develop at unique, individual rates that are often unrelated to their ages.
- Classroom activities should support this developmental approach for each child.
- Every child has the right to feel good about himself/herself.
- Enhancing of the child's positive self-concept will be the focus of many classroom activities.
- Children's natural curiosity and eagerness to learn are enhanced if children are free to follow their natural interests.
- A discovery approach to learning will be incorporated in the classroom to encourage and develop children's curiosity.
- Children learn from interactions with other people.
- The environment will be designed to encourage children to observe other children working, work with other children, and work individually.
- Children need a variety of opportunities in order to encourage creativity.
- The classroom will contain interest centers thereby encouraging simultaneously occurring learning activities. In this way, each child has an opportunity to work in a variety of centers using a variety of materials.

### **1.3 Goals**

The goals established by the purposes and philosophy of the Center are:

- To provide a safe, consistent and enriched environment where developmentally appropriate activities encourage exploration and "hands on" learning experiences.
- To enhance the sense of dignity and self worth within the child and his/her family.
- To encourage spontaneity, curiosity and self-discipline.
- To enhance the child's mental processes by building confidence and self-esteem.
- To enhance patterns and expectations of success for the individual child.
- To provide consistently high quality care by continuously evaluating Center operations.
- To maintain the lowest possible staff to child ratios.

- To constantly encourage parent visitation, input, and participation.

## **1.4 General Operation**

First Environments Early Learning Center will provide services for young children from the ages of six weeks through five years. The center will provide a safe, secure, and stimulating care environment that provides a developmentally centered curriculum. All of the developmental areas of early childhood will be incorporated into an integrated "play as work" organizational concept. These developmental areas will include fine and gross motor development, social skills, moral development, self-help skills, cognitive skills, and pre-academic skills. No one-skill area will be emphasized over any other.

As part of the services of the Center, children will receive nutritious meals and snacks. Nursing mothers will be provided a comfortable space for breast-feeding. Mothers wanting privacy may use the teacher's lounge.

Parent involvement will be an ongoing part of the center's activities. It is a fundamental concept in early childhood education that parents are a child's most important teachers. The staff works hard to create strong relationships between the Center and home. It is our hope that our school will become an extension of your family.

### **1.4.1 Security/Access**

Our building has a state of the art security system. Each parent will be given a code to enter the building. Be sure to enter or exit the building through the main entrance as you will be required to sign your child both in and out each day. If someone else is going to pick up your child, you must contact us in advance. No child will be permitted to leave with an adult without written permission.

Children may not be dropped off or picked up from an outside entrance or over the fence. Please let your child's caregiver know when you are leaving with your child, as we sign children out at the end of the day.

### **1.4.2 Staff**

The quality of any day care center is a direct reflection of its staff. First Environments Early Learning Center recognizes its employees as the center's most valuable component. The personnel policies reflect the respect felt for staff as professionals and provide a basis for understanding and meeting the needs of

both the Center and the families. For this reason, we are committed to providing a working environment that exemplifies cooperation and support.

Our teachers exceed the requirements set by the State of North Carolina for qualification and annual training. Teachers and assistants are required to take 20 additional hours of training each year. All staff members are required to obtain certification in CPR and First Aid. The cost of training is paid for by the Center.

Prior to hiring, each employee must have a criminal record check. We do not hire individuals convicted of child abuse and/or neglect. We only accept teachers with a commitment to parents and children. In order to optimize your child's growth and development, we hire teachers who are interested in providing quality care and stimulating environments.

## **1.5 Corporate Organization**

The Center is sponsored by a nonprofit Corporation, First Environments Parents' Organization, and is licensed by the State of North Carolina Office of Child Day Care Licensing to serve a maximum of 188 children ranging in age from six weeks to five years. First Environments Early Learning Center is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and meets North Carolina's highest day care standards (Five Star). The Center abides by all relevant State rules and procedures.

The 1985 North Carolina Legislation on Child Care and the Child Abuse Reporting Act are on file in the Director's Office. These documents are available to parents upon request.

The daily operation and management of the Center are the responsibility of the Director, while overall direction is the responsibility of the First Environments Parents' Organization Board of Directors. There are five members on the Board of Directors and annual elections alternate between two and three new members.

Members of the Corporation include all parents of children enrolled in the center. Parents are encouraged to serve on the Board of Directors and/or Committees (See section 5.0 Parental Involvement).

## **2.0 Programs**

### **2.1 General Information on Programs**

First Environments is committed to maintaining low staff to child ratios. We firmly believe that the beginning of any quality environment begins with creating close and nurturing relationships between teachers and children. The following are the teacher/child ratios at our center:

Infants (6 weeks to 12 months)	1 teacher to 3.5 children
Toddlers (12 months to 2 years)	1 teacher to 4.5 children
Middlers (2 to 3 years)	1 teacher to 5.5 children
Preschool (3/4 classes)	1 teacher to 8 children
Preschool (4/5 classes)	1 teacher to 10 children

\*Please Note: First Environments has a floating teacher for each age group that brings the ratios lower than above. Ratios may also vary during transitions (when children are moving from one classroom up to the next level).

The First Environments Early Learning Center offers care for infants and children from six weeks old to 5 years old or when they are eligible for kindergarten. The following sections provide a brief description of program emphasis for each age group. Please note that the age ranges given are only approximate and actual placement depends on developmental milestones and individual needs.

### **2.2 Moving From One Classroom to Another**

It is our expectation that parents and the Center's staff will work together when a child needs to move from one age group to the next. We want parents to play an active role in this process.

Teachers, parents or the Director may initiate a class change. Teachers will be notified in writing by the center about when and where a child will move. Your child will be assessed to determine his/her readiness to move from one group to another. Moves are based on the needs of the child, developmental criteria, and the occupancy of the classrooms.

You will receive a written notification of a pending move. Parents are encouraged to interact with the new teacher to learn more about his/her classroom. We try to give children a transitional period of at least two weeks before the move takes place. Transitions are based on the individual child and the time it takes is up to him/her. During the transitional period children, make regular visits to the new classroom.



## **3.0 Enrollment and Procedures**

### **3.1 Application for Enrollment and Waiting List**

Application for enrollment of children ranging in age from six weeks through four years old will be considered without regard to race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. However, priority will be given as follows:

Children of Federal employees will have first priority for admission to First Environments Early Learning Center. Children of visiting fellows, other trainees on stipends at Federal facilities, and children of FEELC staff will have second priority for admission. Non-Federal siblings of current or past students of FEELC will have 3<sup>rd</sup> priority for admission as well as the children of contractors for the Federal government agencies. Please note that siblings of enrolled students will take priority within each of these groups.

First Environments Early Learning Center wants to make a difference in the lives of families and understands that there are many different working schedules. We do not offer part-time spots, but we do allow families to share days of the week. The rules are as follows:

- You may only share with one family.
- You have to share a minimum of two days a week and no more than three.
- We do not allow children to share hours of the day only days of the week.
- There are only two shared spots per classroom at a time.

First Environments contracts with one family. In the event that the child whose family holds the spot leaves our school the child who shares the spot will no longer have placement at our school. Children on FE waitlist will be selected to fill any openings within the center.

### **3.2 Required Fees**

#### **3.2.1 Signup Fees**

**REGISTRATION FEE:** First Environments requires a \$50.00 wait list registration fee. This is charged per child and will be applied to your first tuition payment.

\*\*\*Please note: This fee is non-refundable if First Environments offers a spot within a year of list date and it is not accepted.

DEPOSIT: A \$300 deposit is required prior to attendance. This deposit, minus any monies due, will be refunded upon withdrawal from the Center. The Center requires a 45 day notice of intent to withdraw.

FAILURE TO ACCURATELY COMPLETE FORMS OR PAY FEES IN A TIMELY MANNER MAY RESULT IN CANCELLATION OF THE ENROLLMENT AGREEMENT.

### **3.2.2 Tuition and Late Payments**

TUITION: Tuition is drafted every two weeks on Fridays coincident with the federal pay schedule. The Board sets the tuition when the annual budget is presented at the May general membership meeting. The Board is committed to no more than single digit annual increases in tuition.

First Environments uses a draft program for tuition that follows the above schedule.

Any family that participates in a tuition assistance program will be responsible for any charges or tuition that is not covered by their assistance program.

If your are a family that will be subleasing and require a tuition receipt there is a form available on our website. The form includes our tax identification number. First Environments will not be responsible for any families filling out these forms with incorrect tuition amounts.

LATE PAYMENT FEE: A late fee of \$10 will be charged for any payment or draft that is more than three working days late. Payments that are more than fourteen working days late will constitute notice of intent to cancel enrollment. A fee of \$25 will be charged for each check returned due to insufficient funds.

LATE PICKUP FEE: A fee of \$15 for each 15-minute period, or fraction thereof, past the Center's closing time of 5:30pm will be charged for late pick up.

Fee payments are required whether or not the child is in attendance. Payments will not be adjusted for vacation, sickness, or closure of the Center.

### **3.3 Withdrawals**

It is the Center's policy that parents give the center a minimum of 45 days notice of intent to withdraw. You can email either the Director or Preschool Director or present a letter of your intent to withdraw.

First Environments reserves the right to ask a parent to withdraw their child if it is determined that the child cannot be adequately cared for in the center.

A Center exit questionnaire may be sent to you by First Environments. We appreciate your cooperation in completing this form so we can better serve our children and families.

### **3.4 Special Needs Children and Their Families**

The Center will consider the enrollment of children with special needs. The center does not, however, primarily serve such children. Each special needs child will be considered on an individual basis. Before the application is considered, the parents must furnish the Director with a complete evaluation.

If a child is admitted before any special needs have been identified, the Center will reserve the right to request a complete evaluation to ascertain if the child's needs can be fully met.



### **3.5 Pre-Enrollment Visit**

We would like parents to spend from two to three hours at the Center with their child before the child comes to the center alone. This helps make your child's first experience at our Center a pleasant one. It also gives you an opportunity to get to know the staff. We encourage you to set up a series of "mini" visits (less than one hour). Short stays help your child gain trust in the staff and become familiar with the surroundings. If at all possible, we encourage both parents to accompany the child during these "mini" visits.

### **3.6 Required Enrollment Information**

#### **3.6.1 Enrollment Form**

The Enrollment Form asks the parents for work-schedules, gives accident and health information and explains the payment policy and agreement. We ask you to provide the enrollment information so that we can get to know your child and family as quickly as possible and so that we can understand your child and his/her needs. All information you provide will be kept strictly confidential and will be used only as necessary for the purposes of the center.

### **3.6.2 Parent Center Contract**

Included in the parent packet, there is a form that parents should sign to indicate that they have read the handbook and agree to abide by all policies and procedures stated.

### **3.6.3 Child Information**

The purpose of this form is to let the center staff know how to best care for your child. Personal information concerning your child is then reviewed to see if your child's needs are being met.

### **3.6.4 Health Data: Medical Form and Immunization Records**

Upon enrollment, your child must receive a physical examination. Our Medical Information Form must be completed prior to enrollment by your child's physician and returned to the Director. This form must be updated each year.

It is the state's policy that your child receives immunizations in order to attend day care. Therefore, it is extremely important that your child's immunization records be kept up to date. It is the parent's responsibility to bring the Center a copy of their child's immunization records for their files.

### **3.6.5 Emergency Information**

The Emergency Form lets the center know who should be contacted in case of an emergency. It also gives us important personal information about your child should the Center not be able to contact you. State law requires two emergency contact phone numbers.

### **3.6.6 Infant's Feeding Schedule**

Parents are responsible for letting teachers know their infant's individual schedule. The law requires that we post these individual infant schedules in your child's classroom. These schedules are very important to insure that your child's needs will be met.

### **3.6.7 CACFP Participant Enrollment Form**

The Center participates in the Child Care Food Program sponsored by the Department of Public Instruction. The goals and purpose of the program are to promote good nutrition, introduce different types of foods, and help teach good eating habits.

### **3.6.8 Pickup / Release Form**

If someone else is going to be picking up your child, the center must be contacted in advance. A release form with names of those authorized to pick up your child and signed by the parent will be kept in your child's file. The state requires that this information be completed on your child's enrollment form. If you do not wish anyone other than yourself to be authorized to pick up your child, this must be stated on the enrollment form. Let us know who will be picking up your child, when he or she will be picked up, if your child knows the person, and provide us with a physical description. We request that any person who will be picking up your child drop by the center for a photograph that will be placed in the child's folder. Remember, this is for your child's protection. Please ask any guest to respect these concerns. An ID may be required.

### **3.6.9 Behavior Management Agreement**

This agreement states that no child shall be subjected to any form of corporal punishment by the owner/operator, or staff of any day care facility. This policy is in accordance with the goals and philosophy of First Environments as well as the State of North Carolina, Office of Day Care Licensing requirements. Therefore, parents are not allowed to use corporal punishment on their child(ren) while on the premises of the facility.

### **3.6.10 Infant/Toddler Safe Sleep Policy**

This states our Center's policy regarding positioning infants/toddlers for safe sleep at First Environments. It states many of our safe sleep practices and what we do to reduce the risk of SIDS. The state requires every Center to have a safe sleep policy.

## **4.0 Center Practices and Policies**

### **4.1 Times of Operation**

#### **4.1.1 Daily**

Operating days and hours will be Monday through Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Please pick up your child in time to exit the building by 5:30 p.m. For the safety of our children, parents are asked to leave the property at 5:30 and not to visit on days when the Center is closed. Security cannot distinguish between visiting and loitering and may ask individuals to vacate the area.

#### **4.1.2 Calendar**

The following calendar includes important events and closings. As other important events are scheduled for the Center, calendar updates will be distributed and will be posted in the Center.

New Year's Day	Independence Day
Thanksgiving	Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
Labor Day	Fall Break (The day after Thanksgiving)
President's Day <sup>1</sup>	Columbus Day <sup>1</sup>
Winter Break (The day before Christmas)	Memorial Day
Veteran's Day	Christmas

<sup>1</sup> Teacher's Workday

When a date to be closed falls on a Saturday, the Center will closed on the previous Friday. When a date to be closed falls on a Sunday, the Center will be closed on the following Monday.

#### **4.1.3 Special Circumstances**

Under certain severe conditions such as inclement weather, facility crisis (i.e. loss of water or power) or national emergency, the Director, in conjunction with the Board, will close the center for the protection of the children and staff. The Center will contact parents through phone, e-mail, and all-hands notices at

NIEHS and EPA so children can be picked up as quickly as possible. Emergency situations can be very stressful on children and the staff is trained at maintaining order in a calm and friendly manner. Parent cooperation during these crises is greatly appreciated.

## **4.2 Attendance**

Regular attendance is expected of all children in the program. In order to maintain staff/child ratios, it is important to call the Center if you will not be bringing your child. We also ask that you call the Center should you be bringing your child in later than your scheduled time. We do ask that parents bring children to school in time for morning activities. We know that from time to time schedules may not permit, but it is for the benefit of your child that he/she comes in time for group activities.

## **4.3 Arrival & Departure**

Arrivals and departures are transitional times for children and need to be handled delicately. Your child may cling to you in the morning or cry when it is time for him/her to leave in the evening. Do not take tears as a personal rejection or the clinging as a sign of dislike for the center. This reaction is normal for a young child. We can work together to make these difficult times a little easier for you and your child.

Bring your child directly into his/her classroom. Please make sure that your child's teacher is aware of his/her arrival. Children should never be left unaccompanied in the parking lot, dropped off at the front entrance, left in the lobby, playground, or halls.

Inform the staff in writing of any special instructions or information that might be needed for that day. Let your child's caregiver know that you have arrived, help your child get settled and then prepare to leave. We request that you say goodbye to your child rather than merely disappear. Your child may cry briefly, but ultimately will trust you more.

Please enter the Center quietly so as not to disturb the activity in progress. We ask that you remember to be courteous to all of our children. A smile and a friendly greeting are always appropriate.

When picking up your child, we ask that you come into the Center through the front entrance of the building. If your child is outside on the playground, we ask that you let your child's teacher know you are picking him/her up. Children may

not be picked up from an outside entrance or over the fence. It is for the safety and security of your child(ren) that we have established these policies.

Since children will not know when they will be leaving, they may be involved in an individual or group activity. Allow your child to "shift gears" by giving him/her a warning period, i.e. "we will be leaving in two minutes" or "after you finish that picture, we will leave." If you need to rush, please call us in advance so that we can help prepare your child prior to your arrival. Please remember to collect any artwork, soiled clothing, and outerwear in the cubby area on your way out.

In addition to security and employee issues, it is very difficult for young children to understand why they are late being picked up. Parents are strongly encouraged to arrive for pickup prior to center closing. A \$15.00 fine will be assessed for every fifteen-minute period or portion thereof that a parent is late in picking up their child.

If a parent is more than one half hour late and has not contacted the center, the Director will attempt to locate the parent. Emergency contact persons will be called to pick up the child as soon as possible. If after one hour, there has been no contact with a parent and no other family member can be located, the center director may decide to contact the Department of Social Services.

**\*\*Please note: You will be required to sign your child in and out at the front desk every day.**

## **4.4 Parking**

First Environments has temporary parking in front of the child care center. These designated child care parking spaces are for dropping and picking up your child. If you are going to be at the Center for any length of time we ask that you park either in the large lot in front of the center for any length of time we ask that you park either in the large lot in front of the Center or in the visitors parking which is located across the main street to the right of the Center. It is necessary that you have the proper identification tag on your car to be able to park in these lots.

### **4.4.1 Parking Lot Safety**

For health, safety, and legal reasons, the Center must insist that cars not be left running in the parking lots and that children are properly restrained in appropriate safety seats when on Center property (this includes driving between buildings). Orange cones are often placed in the parking areas to designate play areas for the children. Extra caution must be taken when driving/parking near these cones.



## 4.5 Meals

The Center participates in the Child Care Food Program, sponsored by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. The goals of this program are to provide nutritious and appetizing meals and snacks for children, introduce different types of foods and help teach good eating habits. We will avoid serving overly sweet items and encourage children to appreciate the natural flavors of a variety of wholesome foods. Service will be family style with lots of opportunities for children to develop their skill in feeding and serving themselves. Seconds will be available for those children who want more. Our weekly menus will be posted for your convenience.

Children may bring lunch from home as long as it meets state nutrition standards. If your child has a food allergy, please make sure that the staff is aware of it; it must be documented, posted and a copy kept in your child's file. We prefer that you bring your infant's breast milk, juice, or water in a plastic bottle. Please label all food items and bottles with your child's first and last name and date.



**Ms. Kathy Lynch our wonderful cook**

Your child will receive meals and snacks depending upon the length of his/her stay at the Center. Typically, breakfast is served from 8:45-9:30 a.m., lunch from 11:45 - 12:30 a.m., and afternoon snack from 3:30 - 4:00 p.m. The Center complies with USDA and the School Food Service requirements.

The serving sizes are outlined below:

	1 - 2 yr. old	3 - 5 yr. old
Breakfast		
Milk	1/2 cup	3/4 cup
Juice, fruit or vegetable	1/2 cup	1/2 cup
Slice of bread/cereal	1/2 slice or 1/4 cup	1/2 slice or 1/4 cup
Lunch/Dinner		
Milk	1/2 cup	3/4 cup
Meat/protein	1 oz. or 1/4 cup	1 1/2 oz. or 3/8 cup
2 Vegetables/fruit	1/4 cup	1/2 cup
Bread or equivalent	1/2 slice	1/2 slice
Snack		
Milk, juice, fruit or vegetable	1/2 cup	1/2 cup
Bread product, protein	1/2 slice or 1/2 oz.	1/2 slice or 1/2 oz.

\*\*\*\* First Environment's portions generally exceed the above guidelines.

## **4.6 Children's Personal Belongings**

### **4.6.1 Infants**

Diapers are provided by the Center, so you do not need to bring anything except several changes of clothing for your child.

The Center provides formula for infants. Parents are required to bring bottles with water to be mixed at the Center. Mothers who are breastfeeding can store milk in the classroom refrigerator. Frozen breast milk can be stored in the freezer for up to three months. Opened jar food can be left in the refrigerator for 24 hours. All formula and breast milk (except frozen) not used in a day's time must be taken home. It cannot be left at the Center overnight.

Parents who prefer a type or brand of diaper, formula, or baby food not provided by the Center may bring such items at their own expense.

Feel free to bring your child a special blanket or soft toy to keep in his/her crib. Mark it carefully to insure that it does not get lost.

#### **4.6.2 Toddlers and Preschoolers**

Dress your child in clothing that is washable and comfortable. When children are hard at work and play, they do get dirty. We view this as a part of healthy growth and development. Some of the "most fun" and best learning activity materials are sand, water, mud, paint and play dough. These will be available to your child regularly.

Please bring several changes of clothing if your child is under the age three. During toilet training time, we request you send your child in clothing that he/she can manage by his/herself. Toddlers and preschoolers need an extra set of clothes, a sweater, and appropriate seasonal clothing for active outdoor play (mittens, boots, bathing suit, etc.). Appropriate shoes for running, climbing and playing are needed (flip-flops and thong sandals are inappropriate).

Toys belonging to your child may be damaged or misplaced at the Center, so we ask that your child leave these items at home. We will provide enough materials for all the children. We do encourage children to share nature, books, and special interest items with us. Children may choose to bring a special interest item for show and tell; however, guns and weapons of any sort are not appropriate and will not be allowed in the Center.

If your child has a "special" blanket or "comfort" item that he/she likes to use at rest time or bedtime, please feel free to bring it. It is most important that you plainly label all your child's clothing and personal items in permanent ink. The Center cannot be responsible for items not labeled.

#### **4.7 Birthday Celebrations**

Birthdays can play an important role in the life of a youngster. We welcome you to celebrate your child's birthday at the Center. No balloons or gift bags are allowed and food is limited to snack time.

#### **4.8 Toilet Training**

When you feel your child is ready to potty train, we will be happy to assist you. Your child may be ready to potty train if he or she is:

- Staying dry for several hours

- Able to communicate the need to use the toilet
- Appears to be aware of wet or soiled diapers
- Is in a cooperative mood

There is no definite age when a child is ready, and many toddlers and two-year olds alternate between periods of cooperative and negative behavior. It is our experience that toilet training is best started sometime between 24 and 36 months of age. Both the parent and staff should use the same procedures for training so that they do not confuse the child. If there is too much anxiety or stress, then it may be better for the child to wait and try again at a later time. During potty training, it is very important to dress your child in uncomplicated clothing that the child can easily manage on his/her own and to provide clothing changes.

We would like to iterate that toilet training in a group affects individual children differently and can actually accelerate or slow your child's training while at the Center.

## **4.9 Outdoor Play**

Outdoor play spaces have been designed with the concept of "continuous" play in mind. A variety of challenging activities will stimulate creative and social play. The equipment and designated play areas will provide gross motor activity, which is so important to healthy growth and development. On days when weather will not permit outdoor activity, our multipurpose room will be converted to a gross motor play area. North Carolina State law requires each child to play outside daily, weather permitting.

## **4.10 Playground Rules**

1. Children may not be out on the playground unless they are being supervised and the appropriate teacher/child ratios are maintained.
2. Teachers must use good judgment on the number of children to allow to play on one piece of equipment at the same time, suggesting that children take turns, or directing their attention toward other equipment or activities.
3. All playground equipment must be used appropriately and safely. Teachers are to make periodic checkups, and keep the administrative staff informed as to what pieces of equipment need to be repaired or replaced. Children should not be allowed to play on or with broken or damaged equipment.

4. All staff must conduct daily cleaning and checks for broken glass or other litter.
5. Teachers are expected to interact and observe children closely while on the playground. Teachers should space themselves so all children can be seen.
6. Children must keep their socks and shoes on while they are on the playground except under supervised water play.
7. Play equipment for the sand area, riding toys, balls and other gross motor equipment is kept in the toy shed. At day's end, all equipment should be returned to the toy shed and stored properly.
8. Toy guns and other similar toys do not have any place in the Center or on the playground.
9. Teachers must help children learn the safe and proper way to handle wheel toys and paved areas.
10. Written accident reports with special attention surface conditions, type, and extent of injury, age, and sex of child, how the accident occurred, and weather conditions must be completed should a child have a minor or serious accident while on the playground.

*When ozone levels are in the orange or red ranges, outdoor activities will be restricted. On orange days, outdoor time will be limited to the mornings and all children will be inside by 4p.m. in the afternoon. On red days, children will be outside only in the morning. Parents of susceptible children are encouraged to discuss their child's condition with the classroom teachers.*

## **4.11 Health and Safety Policies**

The Center would like to encourage all parents to report health and safety hazards to the Director or other designated staff. It is very important to note unusual or strange circumstances that may cause an accident or become a safety issue at the center.

We require staff to document unusual incidents relating to the care of your child such as a bowel movement with blood, a sore that may not be healing like it should, or a child who is unusually irritable without an apparent reason. All incident reports are kept confidential and will be brought to the parent's attention.

### 4.11.1 Illness

If your child becomes ill while at the center, we will do our best to isolate your child if the illness is felt to be communicable. This will be accomplished by removing the child to the reception area or Director's office. You will be contacted and informed of the situation. You must then make arrangements to have your child picked up.

In general, reasons for isolation and/or notification will be fever, diarrhea, vomiting, unusual lethargy, or behavior.

More specifically:

- Temperature (oral equivalent) of 101° or higher. The child must stay home until the temperature has been normal (without medication) for 24 hours. If a child is sent home with a fever, he/she must also stay home for the next school day. This guarantees that they have been fever free for 24 hours. If the temperature is due to a non-contagious condition such as teething or ear infection, we must have a note from the child's physician stating so. *We do not allow the administration of medication for fever reduction unless the fever is due to an immunization reaction.*
- Diarrhea (watery or foamy bowel movements, more frequent than usual). Diarrhea is defined as three to four watery stools during a period of two hours. If the child is sent home for diarrhea, he/she should not return to the center until at least one normal stool has occurred.
- Vomiting (more than usual "spitting up").

Other illnesses or suspected illness that we will send a child home for include:

- Rash accompanied by fever or behavioral change or felt to represent Chicken Pox, Measles, Rubella ("German measles"), Scabies, or Scarlet Fever.
  - Chicken Pox: Exclude for seven days or until all bumps are dry.
  - Measles: Exclude for four days after rash onset.
  - Rubella: Exclude for seven days after rash onset.
  - Scabies: Exclude until treatment completed.
  - Scarlet Fever: Exclude for 24 hours after initiation of antibiotic therapy.

- Conjunctivitis is a reason for exclusion if hemorrhage (red eye) is present. Center reserves the right to request physician evaluation for any red eyes or thick eye drainage but will readmit child if physician submits note indicating noninfectious nature of conjunctivitis. Child can be readmitted after an episode of hemorrhagic conjunctivitis after eye(s) have been treated for 24 hours.
- Streptococcal pharyngitis (strep throat) will be excluded until 24 hours after treatment initiated and 24 hours after fever resolves.
- Whooping cough (pertussis) is excluded for two weeks after onset of cough if not treated. The child may return after 5 days of total 14 days of treatment (Erythromycin) if feeling well. Preventive therapy and vaccine recommended for all contacts.
- Asthma and wheezing is only excluded if previously unrecognized and on no therapy or if too sick to attend.
- Tuberculosis is excluded until on therapy and well OR if local health department requires exclusion.
- Mumps is excluded or nine days after onset of swelling.
- Head lice is excluded until the morning after the first treatment.
- Hand, foot and mouth disease (coxsackie virus), herpes and Fifth's Disease (parvovirus) are not excluded if child is feeling well and without fever although the Center reserves the right to request physician note of non-infectious is excessive drooling is associated with coxsackie or herpes cold sores. Any pregnant personnel must be notified of any exposure or potential exposure to Fifth's Disease due to potential effect on unborn child.
- Influenza should be excluded until resolution; 24 hours after last fever and child well enough to attend.
- Lethargy or discomfort that prevents a child from participation in program activities will result in request to remove child from Center even if diagnosis and other symptoms do not mandate that exclusion.

Please be understanding when asked to seek medical opinion regarding your child's illness. From time to time, the Center Director will request this even when parents feels that the above guidelines are being met. The intent will never be punitive or the action frivolous. Requests of this nature are made in order to

promote the health of all children and staff in our Center. Thank you for your cooperation.

#### **4.11.2 Medication and Medication Forms**

All medicine must be brought to the center in its original container. No drug or other medication will be administered without specific instructions from a physician or the child's parent or guardian. *A medication form must be completed and dated for each day the medicine is to be dispensed.* Information on the form must include the child's name, the name of the medicine, and the amount to be given. The parent must sign and date the form. For accurate administration of medicine, parents must provide a labeled medicine spoon. When the medicine is dispensed, the hour is noted on the form and the staff member who administers the medicine must initial it. The medicine forms are posted in the classrooms; please ask your child's teacher for the location. Upon completion of administering the medicine, it will be returned to you or discarded if not picked up.

*Please note that we cannot administer any over-the-counter medication that does not have your child's specific age or weight limit labeled on the bottle for dosage instructions with out a doctor's written instruction for that medicine.*

#### **4.11.3 AIDS Policy**

Children infected with the HIV virus will be eligible for enrollment at the center. The Director, parent and child's physician will determine whether the child will be able to receive proper care at the center, and whether the child poses a threat of HIV transmission to others. Note: most infected children, particularly those under 18 months of age, do not pose a risk to others. Only persistent biting behavior or the presence of exudative skin lesions would be a reason for exclusion. (The American Academy of Pediatrics).

It will be the Center's policy that the child's and family's rights to privacy are respected. All records of the child's HIV status will be kept strictly confidential. The number of personnel aware of the child's condition will be restricted to those needed to ensure proper care of the child and to detect situations in which the potential for transmission may change.

Day care practices, as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics concerning universal blood and body precautions and procedures, will be followed by all employees.



## **4.12 Emergencies**

In case of an emergency, the staff will follow specific procedures:

Minor Accident:

- Classroom teacher will administer first aid
- An accident report is prepared. One copy will go in the child's folder and the other will be given to the parent.

Serious Accident:

- Staff member brings child to the Center office if the child can be moved. If the child cannot be moved, then a senior staff member will come to assess the child and Center office is notified immediately.
- Rescue squad contacted at 911.
- The child is taken to the Emergency Room.
- The Director or other senior staff member will take the child's folder with him/her to the Emergency Room.
- The parents will be called as the child is being taken to the Emergency Room.
- An accident report is prepared. One copy will go in the child's folder and the other will be given to the parent.

Emergency contact information must be kept current at all times. Please notify the Director of any change. Our staff receives training in First Aid and CPR. We will contact you or your emergency contact person as soon as possible in the event of an emergency.

## **4.13 Fire Drills**

North Carolina law requires that the Center hold fire drills monthly. During the fire drills, the staff will evacuate all the children. Please do not be alarmed if you hear the drill or happen to be in the Center at a time when a fire drill is taking place.

## **4.14 Inclement Weather Policy**

First Environments makes decisions on whether the Center will operate during inclement weather separate from NIEHS and the EPA. The Board President and the Director take into consideration the road conditions, travel advisories and area schools & business openings/closings. Information will be available on news channel websites and TV, as well as on First Environments message machine.

## **4.15 FEELC Emergency Plan**

FEELC has developed an emergency plan to cover situations ranging from severe weather conditions to a widespread RTP area threat. For your convenience, an overview of this plan is at the back of this Handbook (section 6.0). A full copy of the FEELC Emergency Plan is available from the Director upon request.

## **4.16 Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting**

All staff will comply with the provisions of the Child Abuse Reporting Act by bringing suspected cases of abuse and neglect to the attention of the Director. If necessary, the Director will report the suspected case to the County Department of Social Services.

## **4.17 Behavior Management Policy**

It is the policy of the Center and the laws of the State of North Carolina to neither spank nor physically punish a child. A constructive technique for managing behavior and maintaining a child's self worth should be applied. The Director and Assistant Director will provide guidance in these skills. The goal of behavior management is to teach the child self-control and self-correcting techniques. Employees are required to sign a statement. The following guidelines are used for a child.

While each child and each behavioral situation is unique, we shall use a few basic management strategies to help the child learn to manage his/her own behavior. For example, we shall focus our attention on positive behavior while ignoring negative behavior. In addition, when negative behavior arises, we shall redirect the child to another activity. When conflicts arise, problem solving and comforting of feelings will occur. Room arrangement shall be inviting and classroom activities shall be stimulating in order to reduce behavioral problems. Directions or suggestions are stated simply and positively. Actions of the child, not the child's personality, are the focus. Corrective action will be immediate. Consistency will be maintained.

Children will not be isolated, denied food, sleep, or bathroom use due to negative behavior.

Under certain situations, First Environments may require a parent to pick up their child due to aggressive behavior.

## **5.0 Parent Involvement**

### **5.1 Home Center Communication**

Parents are the most significant adults in a child's life. We strive to create mutual respect between parents and the center staff; a partnership for the benefit of the child. Our doors are open to parents at all times.

During the year, the Center sponsors events that all parents are encouraged to participate in, such as afternoon festivals, graduation, and luncheons. Suggestions and volunteers are always appreciated.

Calendars are sent home on a monthly basis with upcoming events for each classroom. In addition, room parents are encouraged to work with the teachers to distribute classroom specific information.

### **5.2 Parent Teacher Communication**

#### **5.2.1 Weekly Communication**

Communication between the parent, child, and teacher is important to ensure a good working relationship. We encourage daily communication between parents and teachers. Parents will receive daily information about their infant's and toddler's progress. For older children, teachers will communicate through daily discussion with parents as well as information boards. Parents are encouraged to visit the classrooms and speak with the teachers as often as possible.

#### **5.2.2 Parent Teacher Conferences**

Our responsibility is to communicate with the parents regarding their children's progress. Our primary method of communication is daily information shared between the staff and parents. The preschool staff is required to hold two Parent Teacher Conferences annually. If a child has problem areas, they will be brought to the parents' attention along with the teacher's strategy to correct the problems. It is our experience that when parents and teachers are able to work and plan together for the child's educational progress, the child benefits greatly.

### **5.2.3 Children's Records**

All records kept on your child are confidential. Your child's records include enrollment information, medical information, accident reports, and assessment/progress reports. You have a right to view your child's records. We ask that you call the Director in advance, if you would like to see the records.

## **5.3 Parent Visitation**

The open-door policy at the Center welcomes parents at any time they wish to visit. Parents are encouraged to visit and to share as many experiences with their children as considered feasible and desirable. It is important for the parent to understand that all may not go smoothly at first. Children may not understand the coming and going of parents and at the beginning may be confused or upset by visits especially when the parents leave. Our staff are trained to understand the children's need for special attention and reassurance during this time. Once the children are well adjusted to the routine at the Center and to the parents going back to work, visits by the parents can become a truly wonderful experience. This means parents can be more involved with their children's daily lives and activities and can participate more fully in their early learning experiences.

When a parent has time and wishes to come to the Center, it is helpful to let the staff participate in the child's preparation for the visit. Otherwise, it may be inconvenient for a parent to wait for the child to disengage from an activity. To the child the interruption could suggest that the child's activity is not very important and that finishing a task is not necessary, so parents are encouraged to call ahead if possible.

Whenever there is a question or a problem regarding visiting the Center or participating with the children, parents are encouraged to confer with the Director or staff.

## **5.4 First Environments Parents' Organization**

### **5.4.1 Special Interest Areas**

The Center encourages parent support and participation, which enriches the program. Parents may work with the classroom teachers, the Director, or Board members to determine areas where volunteers are needed within the Center. One specific volunteer role is that of room parent. Individuals who serve in this capacity serve as a liaison between the teachers, the Board, and the parents.

### **5.4.2 Required Hours**

Each family with a child enrolled in the Center is required to contribute a minimum of twelve hours per year to the Center. Hours may also be earned by participating on the Board, serving as a room parent, joining in on parent workdays, or helping out in classrooms. Work projects that qualify for parent hours are posted in the classrooms and in the Director's office. It is expected that each family will contribute some of its twelve hours by participating in such classroom activities as art, music, cooking projects, or sharing special talents. Families who have earned more than 12 hours in a calendar year cannot roll them over into the next year.

### **5.4.3 Penalty Fees**

Families who have failed to contribute the required 12 hours will be notified two months in advance of the end of the year. Those who fail to meet this requirement will pay a fee of \$50 for each hour not met. For purposes of computing hours, the year starts September 1, and ends August 31. Families will owe one (1) hour for every calendar month or fraction of a month that you are in the Center.

Parent participation can really enhance the quality of the Center without adding to the cost. It is also a wonderful way to keep in touch with what is going on in your child's life and to provide support for the staff that is creating a nurturing environment for the children. Please contribute of your time as generously as you can.

## **5.5 Parent Meetings**

All parents of children who attend the center will be invited to attend the biannual Parent Organization meetings. These meetings are held in May and November. Next year's budget will be discussed at the May meeting and the November meeting provides a time for updates and discussion on any issues that concern the entire Center.

## **5.6 Volunteers**

Whenever possible, parents are invited to share their time and talents with the children. Please check with your child's teacher, as she/he will know the best time to set up a visit and may suggest materials for you to bring. If you would like

to spend time in your child's classroom, or assist with a classroom or center event, contact your child's teacher.

At times, volunteers from the community may be brought in to work with the children. The Foster Grandparent program, hospital volunteers, and student interns provide the center with additional adults, lowering our teacher/child ratio so that children are able to receive more individual attention.

## **5.7 Parent Conduct**

Parents are expected to conduct themselves in a courteous and respectful manner. The relationship between parents and teachers impacts the wellbeing of all our children and should serve as a role model for healthy, adult interactions. While issues with teachers should not be discussed in front of children, parents should feel that they can communicate their concerns and complaints directly to the caregiver of their child provided it is done in a civilized and considerate manner. Parents may also talk directly to the Director. Displays of anger or hostility are not appropriate. Neither the Director or teachers have the authority to change center policy; issues of policy should be brought before the Board of Directors.

Certain actions are so serious that they will lead to immediate disciplinary action. Such actions include but are not limited to:

- Comments of a sexual nature
- Racial, ethnic or religious slurs
- Violence or inappropriate language
- Smoking or drinking on school property
- Disrespect of the staff, children or other parents

### **Disciplinary Action**

If a parent is in violation of Center Policy, this violation will be brought to the attention of the parent. First time violations or minor incidences may be discussed verbally with the parent by an individual Board member. The Board member, however, shall make it clear to the parent that this is a formal verbal warning and a written record will be kept in the Board minutes. More serious violations or repeated minor violations will result in a written warning from the Board of Directors to the parent. The parent will be asked to formally acknowledge the warning and corrective actions may be required. As a last resort, the Board may ask a family to leave the center. Timing of the departure will at the discretion of the Board of Directors. A parent who disagrees with any disciplinary action may submit a written complaint as directed below.

## Complaint Resolution and Grievance Policy

In cases where problems or misunderstandings arise, the parent should attempt to resolve the issue through discussions with the teacher involved and the Director. If the parent is unable to resolve the issue in this manner, she/he should contact a Board member and may submit a formal complaint as directed below.

When a parent disagrees with the Director or Board, she/he shall submit the complaint in writing to the Board of Directors. The Board will investigate the situation and determine a resolution. The decision by the Board will be binding and will end all further discussion of the issue.

Any parent who continues to discuss the issue after the Board has determined the resolution will be in a state of non-compliance and subjected to disciplinary action.

### **5.8 Solicitations Policy**

It is our policy at First Environments Early Learning Center that neither parents nor staff may solicit either parents or staff for funds, services, or products that are not specifically related to fund-raising activities for the Center. If a parent or staff member is participating in a fundraiser for another non-profit organization, he/she may request permission from the Board to post notices at the Center. The Board will approve or disapprove such requests on a case-by-case basis.

## 6.0 OVERVIEW OF EMERGENCY PLAN

There are three basic responses to an emergency based on the assessment made by the Center Director: In an Emergency situation at FEELC, the Center Director will make the determination to “Shelter in place”, Relocate or Evacuate the children and staff.

### 6.1 “Shelter in place”

In certain emergency situations (eg. Severe Storms, Tornadoes, Snow, Hazardous Materials) the need to “Shelter in place” may be determined. This action provides short term or long term care for children when normal routines are interrupted. This may be temporary until FEELC can resume normal operations, or until children are picked up by parents.

### 6.2 Relocation

In the event of an emergency, FEELC children will be moved to nearby Relocation areas. This relocation may be temporary until FEELC can resume normal operations or until all children are picked up by parents.

Depending on the nature of the emergency, the designated relocation areas are:

- For emergencies involving Fires, Smoke. Hazardous Materials:

Infants: assemble in parking lot in front of Bldg.20.

Toddlers: assemble in playground next to Bldg.20.

Preschool: assemble in parking lot beside Bldg.18.

- For emergencies where there is an immediate Area Threat (i.e.: bomb threat, flood, other major building problem, etc.):

All Children: assemble in field south of Bldg.19.

### 6.3 Evacuation

In the event of a more widespread area threat (i.e.: Sponsor evacuation, chemical spill, widespread fire, etc.) or a mass ordered evacuation (i.e.: declared state of emergency), an Evacuation of FEELC will be necessary. Under such circumstances, two situations are anticipated:

(1) Children will either “Shelter in place” or be moved to the designated Relocation area in the field south of Bldg.19 until parents or designated adults would retrieve the children. Center staff would remain until all children are



released to a parent or guardian. All parents should designate on Emergency Information forms the names of additional adults approved to pick-up a child, in case there is a disruption to the normal routine.

(2) if an Evacuation of the FEELC site is deemed necessary without delay, the Center Director will make the necessary decisions to move the children to a safe location in or around the RTP area using all means of transportation available. It must be stressed that such actions will only be taken under extreme situations where the danger to the children is imminent. At the time of such emergency, the Center Director will be in contact with Public Safety Officials that will specify the evacuation sites in and around RTP. Under these circumstances, the Center Director will keep Parents informed via the Parent phone tree, and local media (TV/Radio) will be disseminating such information too.

Priorities for an emergency response: are that the Center Director makes response decisions in the best interest of the child's safety, whilst ensuring a robust accountability process for all children.

FEELC will continue care of children until parent/guardian or an authorized individual picks up the child. 1/2 hour after the center closes during a emergency staff will call parents and emergency backup. 1 hour after Center closes and there has been no contact with the parents or emergency backup DSS will be contacted. If help from DSS is not available the Director will authorize either the Pre-School Coordinator, Team Leader or herself to take the child home with them.